

Officiating A to Z

Referee Goals for Every Game You Work

By Mark Wunderlich

Consistency is the key, but how do we become consistent? Habits and mechanics have to be solid every night. Here is an A-to-Z list to help keep you in check. Keeping good habits and having great mechanics from all three positions is what makes an effective, active and accurate official. Be the official that your league staff can rely on every night. When you have the A-to-Z points in check, your consistency level will be something everyone can expect from you every year, game and possession. It's the road to the next level.



A Awareness. The key word to success — keep a high concentration level.

B Basket drives. Be slow in the lead and process plays to the basket.

C Clocks. Knowing the clocks, especially the shot clock, tells you the urgency needed to get an open look. When the clock is under five seconds, a shot is imminent.

D Defender. Always read the defense (referee the defender) in one-on-one situations.

E Experience level. Officiate to your level of experience, and try not to do more than experience level will allow.

F Finish. Allow plays to start, develop and finish.

G Guessing. Guessing will cause problems. Never guess. Withstand that moment of pressure. Know the call when you blow your whistle!

H Habits and mechanics. Have good ones. Referee the same way for every possession every night by creating good habits and knowing the mechanics from all three positions — lead, center (slot) and trail.

I Impact. Know when you blow the whistle it may have an effect on the game. Always be sure. (Remember letter G above!)

J Jump first. When defenders jump first, find the point of contact. It's hard to have marginal contact on a jump shooter. Locate where he or she touches the offensive player first.

K Know the team fouls. Don't miss a penalty situation that might lead to a correctable error.

L Loose-ball fouls. Be mechanically sound. Get outside the farthest rebounder as the lead. Trail and center should keep eyes down. Don't follow the flight of the ball.

M Marginal. Know your marginal contact line. Be calibrated with marginal contact vs. illegal contact so you remain consistent on both ends.

N No corners, only strikes. When calling in your secondary area, throw a strike — not on the corners, but right down the middle.

O Open look. Only call a play when you have an open look.

P Post play. Officiate post-entry passes to see first point of contact with ball/body (legal) or body/ball (illegal).

Q Questions. Try to respond to all legit questions, but acknowledge statements from coaches and players.

R RSBQ. Rhythm, speed, balance and quickness when affected are illegal.

S Screens. Be aware when two offensive players are in motion at the same intersection.

T Trail connection. Stay attached as the trail, who can have crew-saving calls. (Remember letter N above!)

U Understand your tools. Use technical fouls for game control. Make sure they are defensible and effective in keeping your game in check.

V Verticality. Jumping and landing in the same spot is legal. Understand and penalize all A-to-B (forward) movement, including side-to-side.

W Worst critic. Watch your game video and be your own worst critic. We learn from hearing, seeing and doing!

X eXecute your principles. Use the same principles every night. Work them and that will make you consistent.

Y Your game-changing moments. React to physical play and don't let it escalate.

Z Zone in on primary. Be aggressive in your primary area of responsibility.

Mechanics and good habits, along with having solid principles every night, will separate you from the pack. Always attack the game from the opening tip. *Former NBA official Mark Wunderlich refereed in the league for 21 seasons, including the 2008 and 2009 NBA Finals. He is the senior development manager of the NBA's Referee Operations Department.* □